"To promote Christian ideals for agriculture and rural life; to interpret the spiritual and religious values which inhere in the processes of agriculture and the relationships of rural life; to magnify and dignify the rural church; to provide a means of fellowship and cooperation among rural agencies: *Toward a Christian Rural Civilization.*"

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WHAT THE RURAL CHURCH MEANS TO ME*

By Christian Farmers Around the World

THE CHURCH A CONSTANT REMINDER - - By J. H. Wilmer, Clanfield, Oxon., England

British agriculture from being a neglected child twenty years ago has now become one of the most highly mechanized in the world. In their efforts to get the most out of their equipment many farmers have found it necessary to forget the fourth Commandment.

As a practising - though by no means perfect - Christian farmer, I feel that the rural church with its harvest festival services, which we are now celebrating, and other rallys and functions, is a constant reminder to the community that there are other things in life besides money and machines.

Those of us who are regular attenders also have the opportunity of meeting others who are of like mind and we are helped by each other's fellowship. I feel that the influence of the rural church is out of all proportion to its numbers and the English countryside would be the poorer without it.

THE CHURCH SHOULD BE FIRST - - By As'ad Marina, Nabitayeh, Lebanon

The church should be first before anything else in our village. It is more important than food or clothes. Furthermore, the church is an honor to us, for when we take care of our church and it is functioning well, then, the other people of the village see that we are sincere in our faith. By means of the church we can arrive at whatever we need that is worthwhile.

Note: These words were spoken at a critical time when the church people were trying to select a "mukhtar" (local mayor) for their Protestant community. The village of Ein Shaara, on the eastern slope of Mt. Herman, overlooking Damascus.

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* More and more the Christian Rural Fellowship is considered as a worldwide fellowship, linking people of different countries in a Christian world fellowship. For this bulletin we have invited farmers of different countries to tell us what the rural church means to them. The response has been most encouraging. As you read these statements we hope you will realize more fully the meaning of the Christian Rural Fellowship Motto: Toward a Christian Rural World !

I. W. Moomaw - Secretary

A MEANINGFUL FELLOWSHIP - - By Virgil Marshall, Adel, Iowa - U. S. A.

I know that God is no respector of persons and that we can be just as near Him on a crowded street as in the quiet of the forest or sitting beside some laughing brook in the countryside. Still to me the country church has a peculiar appeal. What could be more fitting than a house of worship set among the fields of grain and the green pastures of the countryside ? Then, when country people meet to worship together in a country church, it seems to stimulate a fellowship that is especially wonderful.

Our own church is set upon a low hill beside fields of grain and overlooking a small valley with its meandering brook and hillsides covered with hay and pasture and dotted, here and there, with cattle and sheep. When the minister reads of Jesus and His disciples going through the fields of grain, the sower going forth to sow, or "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want. He maketh me to lie down in green pastures. He leadeth me beside the still waters", - how meaningful it becomes and how easy it is for us to understand! Rural people, living as they do close to nature, at least should be more conscious of the Great Creator, and where can we better worship Him than there, amidst the beauty of His creation ?

Yes, I love our church in the country. I would not trade it for any other in the world.

THE TAP ROOT OF OUR RELIGION - - By George Hamilton, Stanbridge, East Que., Canada

I presume that by "rural church" we mean a collection of people gathered together to worship God and to live as God would wish. Naturally, the building in which this meeting takes place has become honored as the house of God, but it does not seem to me to be of such importance as the acts of worship which take place inside it, or as the innermost thoughts and deeds of those attending. I could enjoy a religious service equally well in an open field, a forest, or beside a lake ! Maybe more so !

I think farmers all over the world are naturally religious, though perhaps unconsciously. I know that in the course of a day's work, with the wonders of God all around us, I often think of Him. When I am plowing or sowing or reaping, I often wonder to what purpose my efforts would be were it not for the help of God. When I see the sun rise over the trees to the East, I cannot help but glory in the wonders of God, - as also, I glory in the new life starting every spring, and the beauty and grandeurs of death in the fall.

I go to church because it is a comfort to me to share with others, be they lowly or mighty, the act of worshipping God. I enjoy the Communion Service as it gives me peace to collect my thoughts in the presence of God and to ask help for others and my family, as well as forgiveness for myself, and to thank God for everything.

I rely on the church to help me give my children a good Christian discipline and religious instruction, both of which are sadly lacking in our schools.

I look upon the rural church as the tap root of our religion. Without a good root system, the plant cannot flourish.

I ENJOY THE CHURCH SERVICE - - By Kiyoto Kahehashi, Imorino Church, Japan

I enjoy the church service especially of Sunday. Because Sunday is the Holy Day for me, from God. It is a real and only one fountain to refresh us, the way for redeeming our sins against our Father. In fellowship it is like to drink and share the sweet water with our folks who are new or old, after morning service. We must build many rural churches in prayerful effort.

This is my living testimony.

THREE REASONS - - By three Korean Farmers, Taejon, Korea

The church guides us not to sin. The rural church means how to live with other people peacefully, - means helping needy people, and - how to witness to other people the leading of Christ.

MORE THAN THE FINEST FARM IN THE WORLD - - By Francisco Acosta, Oriente, Cuba

I am a cane-cutter and have never had any land even for a garden spot. My humble home is by virtue of the fact that I work for the sugar mill, which supplies a place of residence.

I have seven sons, all grown men now. Before they were converted, they were roustabouts, dashing young fellows living a loose life, with tobacco, rum and gaming tables, as well as cockfighting. The conversion of these seven sons and their incorporation into the rural church has meant more to me than to have the finest farm in the world or to have won the grand prize in the lottery. The rural church, therefore, has meant the transformation of the lives and character of my seven sons. That is what it means to me.

DOOR TO SALVATION - - By Dean Thomas, Aline, Oklahoma - U. S. A.

The rural church means many things to me and to my family. First, it opens the door to salvation with Jesus.

Second, it provides for us a way to express our thanksgiving to the Lord for the blessings he showers upon us, even through drought and flood, for where can we come closer to God than through nature and the soil of which he has given so abundantly.

Third, it gives us a fellowship, with God, with our friends and fellow Christians, which brings forth in me a warmth and kindredship, I could find through no other source than our own rural Christian church.

U. S. A.

AN INFLUENCE TOWARD GOODWILL - - By Mr. & Mrs. Andrew Snyder, Selingsgrove, Penna.

As a farm family the rural church means that here in our farming community we have the presence and influence toward goodwill which a church offers. Here we have the opportunity to worship in an environment that is familiar to us. As farmers our lives are very busy, and the rural church offers a program of worship and activity in keeping with our way of life. Here we can find the source of social fellowship and spiritual renewal that we need to live fuller and more expressive lives.

U. S. A.

SURROUNDED BY BEAUTY - - By Mr. & Mrs. Lester Leister, McAlisterville, Penna.

The rural church causes us to think more deeply about our daily experience living on the farm. The cares and responsibilities and the common things to be done have a deeper meaning. The rural church is surrounded by the beauty that Nature brings to us, and it gives us a deeper and more sincere desire to worship. Sometimes the group of people that gathers together in a rural church is small, but we are eager to hear and learn about the Bible and its teachings. There we find fellowship and devotion, too.

HARD TO EXPRESS IN WORDS - - By Ralph Whitney, Salem, Nebraska - U. S. A.

Whenever we travel we see many churches, some magnificent in structure, some small, their steeples pointing heavenward, symbols of all that is eternal. Our church is a small rural church standing, white and high on a hill, visible proof that God is the leader in our community.

It is hard to express in words what our church means to us. We take it for granted. It is only when we try to picture our community without one that we appreciate our house of worship and realize how it is the underlying current that directs the lives of the individual, the family, and all activities in the community. We are glad we have a rural church where we can join our neighbors in Christian fellowship and worship with our pastor.

Our church is a great heritage of faith. We are grateful to those who built it and have kept its doors open. The only way we can show our appreciation is to attend regularly and give of our time, talents, possessions, - that we, too, may pass on this heritage to our children.

ALL I AM OR EVER HOPE TO BE - - By Russell Creighton, Warsaw, Indiana, U.S.A.

I am one of six children who was carried in my mother's arms to a church in Atwood, Indiana, with a population under 200. In the past forty years I can remember my grandmother, mother, brother, sister, wife, son, daughter and myself, all attending that church, and teaching in the same Sunday school. We have lived on farms and always knew personally all the members of our church, ranging in membership from 150 to 250.

The Christian influence I received from my parents and our rural church has made me what I am or ever hope to be.

WE FIND VICTORY IN CHRIST - - By Bhimjibhai Surati and Gabnajhai Jatria,
Vyrara, Surat Dist., India

Our forefathers were in ignorance, superstition and given to wine-drinking. They did not have a clear course to follow when ill or facing death. Ignorance and superstition put life in danger and fear. There was no joy or peace.

Though our circumstances were quite adverse we were rescued by the Lord Jesus. By God's Grace we were lifted up and day by day we are progressing in acquaintance with Christ. We thank the church for the development of such as ourselves.

Our spiritual lives have deepened. Our faith has become firm. We have felt Christ's strength and leading. For our spiritual nourishment the Church has provided preachers, deacons, and evangelists. In addition to the Sunday schools, public worship services, they conduct prayer for our sick and prayer meetings in our homes. Our leaders also ask God's blessings upon the seeds we sow, and teach us to be thankful to Him for the crops we harvest. Some of our people take advanage and learn to read through the help of volunteers. Very useful things are learned.

We are now in a large layman farmer's institute where we engage in Bible study and learn more about the church. We are also learning to raise better poultry, and have better health. When quarrels, misunderstandings, etc. arise, we can settle them by Christ's example of love. We are saved from intoxicating liquors and bad habits which destroy the physical, mental and moral life.

As Christian farmers we experience our Lord's presence. We are taught to give our Lord His share; thus, we become blessed and happy.

OPPORTUNITY FOR EACH OTHER -- By Arno Winkler, Columbia, Missouri, U. S. A.

At the rural church friends and neighbors can have closer fellowship. There is a greater interest among a group of people when the daily routines are similar. To me it seems that the people can keep in closer relations and have better communion with each other when attending the rural church. Since the rural church has a smaller congregation, I feel there is a greater opportunity for each member to have an equal part in the church affairs. By distributing the duties of the church, each family feels they are a part of it.

BECAUSE OF MY SIX CHILDREN - - By R. L. Covington, McKinney, Texas, U. S. A.

The rural church to me has been one of the most wonderful experiences I have ever known. Having been a member of a rural church for forty years myself, wife and I have reared six children and have seen them accept Christ as their Savior in a rural church; for this we will always be grateful to the rural church.

And too, like any church, although we are small in numbers we can attend our church and receive the spiritual blessings that are so essential to the Christian way of life. We, as rural church Christians, can be thankful for the testimonials that some of the outstanding ministers of today took roots in the the rural church.

NOTHING ELSE COULD TAKE ITS PLACE - - By Vernon K. Dreher, Coshocton, Ohio, U.S.A.

In this day of machines and self-sufficiency, the art of neighborliness is soon to be lost. So, to me, the rural church means a place where I meet my neighbors and friends in Christian fellowship, sharing our joys and sorrows, and where we come to feel a concern for others. In this it must not fail, for nothing else could take its place.

RESPONSIBLE STEWARDSHIP - - By L. Vachier, Le Drome, Arnayon, France

What does membership in a church mean for me ? It means that I am not living alone, in isolation, surrounded by somewhat forbidding natural environment and by neighbors who are indifferent or competitive. I am living where the Lord wants me to live, surrounded by brothers in the faith and neighbors; that I am not living

like everybody else, simply for the pursuit of material goods, but in order to assume responsibility and duties as the result of knowing Jesus Christ, our Lord; That I receive much and am ready to give much; That I share in the spiritual, moral,and financial concerns of the congregation.

FROM HOLLAND - - By Jac de Feyter, Hengstdijk, Holland

Through our rural church I have contacts with other people of the same spiritual structure as myself. This has strengthened me many times in my life.

GOD'S HOUSE OF FAMILY WORSHIP - - By J. Kennedy Kincaid, Jr., Athens, Illinois U. S. A.

The country church today remains God's house of family worship. For there the minister, the faithful choir, and the entire family, - from tottering to teetering age, - praise God in one accord. Physical limitations prevent a departmental worship of God. There exists a fellowship of man to man, and man to God, that so characterized the early church of Jesus Christ. There is no room for spectators in this congregation; for each must invest his talents in Christian service if the doors are to remain open. These churches today stand as the living memorials to the colonial churches of another day that inspired the forefathers of our country.

DEVELOPS THE WHOLE MAN - - By James T. Whittaker, Auburn, Alabama, U. S. A.

To me the rural church provides for the spiritual and social needs of rural people. It provides for the transformation of individuals and families, into a community that is united in Christ and cooperating for their mutual welfare.

The rural church provides an opportunity for Christian men and women to exercise leadership in realizing the Fatherhood of God and the Brotherhood of Man. The church helps man to see more clearly that Christianity permeates the whole area of living; thus, the church stands as a symbol, not only of spiritual growth, but of economic growth, health improvement, and for Christian leadership training. To me, then, the church seeks to develop the whole man.

PHILIPPINE FARMERS SPEAK - - (From the Philippine Federation of Christian Churches)

It is my church that is making me aware that I am God's partner in my farm - Juan O. Sagan.

The Christian ministry of the church has made me a transformed man - Apolonio Flores.

No lovelier place in our village than the church. The church taught me how to love God and my fellowmen and gives purpose to my life - Jeremias Calagui

It is my church giving meaning to my work on the farm - Juan Marigza.

Our village church is the heart of the community. There is no better place to go than to our church - Gregorio F. Larida

It was my church that taught me " that men shall not live by bread alone." Since then, I am a better farmer - Jose Velasco, Jr.

The church showed me the way to the peaceful way of life - Genaro Caranza II.

It was my church that taught me to serve God and my fellowmen - Pedro M. Ratert

It was in my church that I learned the interpretation of life -Benjamin I. Asis

It is the church that encourages me when I am in distress and sorrow or trial. I find inner joy, warm fellowship, and opportunity for service in my church. I need the church and the church needs me. - Acer M. Mendoza

IT REPRESENTS A NEW LIFE - - By Roque Agostinho, Sao Paulo, Brazil

When I came into the church, it truly represented a new life for me. I was brought up outside the church and religion meant nothing to me. I married a Christi woman but still I didn't become interested in the church until 1932. I was seriousl ill and while my wife read the Bible and prayed beside what we thought was to be my death-bed, I vowed that if I should recover I would unite in faith with her. Upon my recovery I kept this vow and I have never regretted it.

My family life is completely changed. My best friends are in the church. In fact my brothers in Christ mean much more to me than my blood brothers who do not yet desire to share my faith. When I first became a member of the church, our whole family walked eleven kilometers each Sunday to attend services. Later, we moved and there we walked thirty-six kilometers every Sunday, including two trips to the church.

FROM SOUTHERN RHODESIA - - By Solomon Chiwara & Job Tsiga Tamutsa, - Nyadiri Cente

The church came here to help us. It gave us Christian life. It taught us how to do good things and how to keep our homes clean and to help others to come to Chri It helped us when we had many crops from our fields. We give to the church and we give to the poor. The soil and many things were given to us by God and we keep them carefully. Some people are farmers, some are herders, some are chiefs, and some are all sorts.

God created men and the land was given for men to work on it. The church we call the House of God.